

The Journal

■ Current Issue

■ Supplements

■ Back Issues

Contents in full

Talking points

Original research

News

Editorial and
review

Correspondence

Uses of error

Clinical picture

Dissecting room

Department of
error Search Journal Subscribe

Home > The Journal > Back Issues > News

Volume 359, Number 9323
15 June 2002

Policy and people

**US-led health programme breaks down
boundaries in Middle East**

The Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) Ministerial Steering Committee, chaired by US Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, has voted in favour of setting up a patient care mission, starting with radiotherapy services for patients living in Palestine. There is "an urgent need for the 400 patients who need radiotherapy every year", said Munzer Sharif, the Palestinian Deputy Minister of Health, who added that he was "very pleased to hear about the initiative".

To date, Palestinian patients have been referred to Israeli and Jordanian treatment facilities, but the security closures and the accumulated debts for previous treatment--some US\$10 million to Israeli hospitals --have all but prevented any new patients receiving therapy, said Sharif.

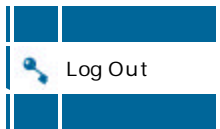
MECC's Executive Director Michael Silberman said "this is a two-step action, first to assure immediate access in the region, in Jordan, Israel, or Cyprus, for patients in need of treatment; and simultaneously to plan for two radiotherapy centres and faculty training, for the West Bank and Gaza".

Faleh Al-Nasser, the Jordanian Minister of Health and Health Care, emphasised the need for haste. "Patients who manage to escape the closure and get to Jordan do so privately and need financial help."

Joe Harford, the associate director for special activities at the National Cancer Institute (NCI; Bethesda, MD, USA), who had assisted in the birth of MECC under former NCI director Richard Klausner, endorsed Al-Nasser's suggestion, providing "the numbers can be worked out".

MECC's success seems to have had a great effect on the Middle East medical community. The newly appointed chief scientist of the Israel Health Ministry, Rami Rahamimoff (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)--who serves on the MECC Board of Governors--has recommended creating a new Middle East Health Consortium using MECC as "model for productive cooperation".

The new initiative would "reach well beyond cancer" and "involve other NIH [National Institutes of Health] institutes to make this outreach truly comprehensive and beneficial to all people in the region". Rahamimoff suggested that the cross-border health programme should first tackle infectious diseases, child health, and mental-health conditions.



- Jobs
- Awards and Announcements
- Conferences
- Press Services
- General Info
- Free Sample
- Info for Authors
- Contact Us



Thompson has expressed his enthusiasm for the proposals. While Frixos Saviddes, Cypriot Minister of Health, summed up the feeling among MECC's members that "were the US to lead the effort, it would be a great inspiration and assistance to the area". Thompson has proposed to lead a delegation of experts from the US NIH and other US government agencies that would meet for a 1-day planning session to convene in the Middle East, to examine "feasibility and how to implement the plan", adding that "we need a bigger vision" and "a readiness to take a very positive role in developing good care for the region".

Rachelle HB Fishman

[▲ top](#)

